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## RAINWISE REBATES A WIN FOR RESIDENTS

When heavy rain overwhelms combined sewer systems, these systems fail and overflow sewage into our waterways. Ballard's sewer systems have traditionally been some of the worst culprits for these overflows. RainWise is a city program that is trying to change all that.

RainWise pays Ballard residents to install rain gardens and cisterns on their properties. The city hopes that a critical mass of rain gardens will help to slow the flow of rainwater into the combined sewer overflow system (CSO). The program rolled out in July 2010 and over 30 homeowners have taken advantage of it so far.

Anne Forrester installed two cisterns and a rain garden on her property on 67<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> avenue NW. When record rains fell in early December, her rain garden handled it without a problem. The rain garden only filled half way and the water completely soaked into the ground after a couple hours. Forrester was taken aback by how quickly the water soaked in and was pleased with how much she kept out of the sewer system. She wasn't aware of the problems associated with combined sewer systems before installing her rain garden. "I knew about not washing cars or dumping oil but I never knew before about the actual problem with stormwater. The rain garden is a win win. It's a great thing to have in your yard and a great thing for the environment." Forrester's children were fascinated learning about how different species of plants need different amounts of water. She believes educating children about stormwater pollution is crucial. They are currently taught about not putting pollutants into storm drains, but they aren't really taught about stormwater runoff and sewer system problems as a whole. Teaching children is essential to the overall public understanding of this issue.

Peter Albert, a Rainwise participant, has tried to spread the word. After installing his rain garden, he put a sign in his yard and emailed his neighbors. He often gets questions from pedestrians. Cindy Eckholt also raves about hers. Her rain garden has a nice variety of plant species including irises and hydrangeas. "It hasn't spilled over on the sidewalk or anything. It's perfect and I just love it."

Eleanor Trainor installed a rain garden in July 2010 to help with her basement problems. Her and her neighbors' basements were consistently wet after a hard rain. She suspects the sewer systems have far more leaks than most people imagine. The rain garden not only solved the moisture problem, it beautified her yard. "First off, it's really beautiful and the fact that it's functional is a bonus. It really changes how my home looks and has inspired my neighbors to consider it for their yards." Trainor was pleasantly surprised by how easy it was to work with the city on the construction and rebate process. Her friends barely believe her when she tells them that she was able to get free custom landscaping done by a premiere northwest gardener. She hopes more homeowners will get on board.